

Introduction from Fr Gerry

A new Vatican Preparatory Document for the Special Assembly of Synod of Bishops on Amazonia, October 2019 has been published.

The following are five of my selected quotes from the document, which were posted to our social media over a five-day period.

Fr Gerry

5 Daily Reflections & Quotes from Vatican Preparatory Document, Special Assembly of Synod of Bishops on Amazonia, October 2019

Day 1

The Amazon

Welcome to our parish series of five daily quotes. This time we focus on the Amazon and its importance to the whole human family. The quotes are from the new Synod Preparatory Document issued 8th June by the Vatican.



“The Amazon Basin encompasses one of our planet’s largest reserves of biodiversity (30 to 50% of the world’s flora and fauna) and freshwater (20% of the world’s fresh water).

It constitutes more than a third of the planet’s primary forests and – although the oceans are the largest carbon sinks – the Amazon’s work of carbon sequestration is quite significant.

It covers more than seven and a half million square kilometers, and 9 countries share this great Biome (Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela, including French Guyana as an overseas territory).

The so-called “Islands of Guyana” – bordered by the Orinoco and Black Rivers – the Amazon River, and the South American Atlantic coasts between the mouths of the Orinoco and Amazon Rivers, are also part of this geographical area.

Other areas are counted as part of the territory because they fall under the influence of its climatic and geographical system due to their proximity to the Amazon Basin.

However, these details do not imply a uniform region. We can identify many types of “Amazonias” within the Amazon Basin.

In this context, it is water – through its gorges, rivers, and lakes – that becomes the region’s organizing and integrating element, with its main axis being the Amazon, the mother and father river of all.”

Day 2

Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon

The new Catholic document on the Amazon explains the plight faced by Indigenous Peoples. This quote introduces us to some of the complex issues faced.



“In addition, the peoples of the jungle – gatherers and hunters par excellence – survive on what the land and the forest have to offer.

They watch over the rivers and the land, just as the land cares for them. They are the custodians of the rainforest and its resources.

Nonetheless, the wealth of the Amazonian rainforest and rivers is being threatened by expansive economic interests, which assert themselves in various parts of the territory.

Such interests lead, among other things, to the intensification of indiscriminate logging in the rainforest, as well as the contamination of rivers, lakes, and tributaries (due to the indiscriminate use of agro-toxins, oil spills, legal and illegal mining, and byproducts from the production of narcotics). Added to this is drug trafficking, which together with the above puts at risk the survival of those peoples who depend on the region’s animal and plant resources.

On the other hand, the cities of the Amazon Basin have grown quite rapidly and have integrated many migrants forcibly displaced from their lands, resulting in the expansion of large urban centers ever-deeper into the rainforest.

Most of these migrants are indigenous peoples of Afro-descent hailing from river lands, who have been expelled by illegal and legal mining and by the oil extraction industry.

They often find themselves cornered by the expansion of timber extraction and are those most affected by agrarian and socio-environmental conflicts.

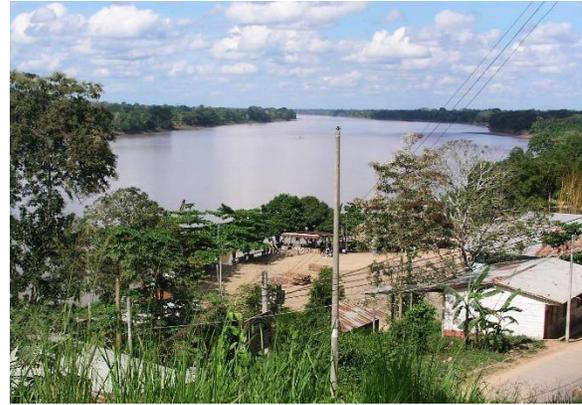
Cities are also characterized by social inequalities. The poverty produced therein throughout history has generated relationships of subordination, of political and institutional violence, and of increased alcohol and drug consumption – both in cities and in rural communities.

Poverty represents a deep wound in the lives of many Amazonian peoples.”

Day 3

Justice and the rights of peoples

In this quote from the new Vatican document on the Amazon, we are challenged to identify what harms the relationship between God the Creator and ourselves in the Amazon and on our planet.



Puerto Maldonado on Madre de Dios river

“Pope Francis, in his visit to Puerto Maldonado, called for a change in the historical paradigm, as a result of which States view the Amazonia as a storage room filled with natural resources, with little regard for the lives of indigenous peoples or for the destruction of nature.

The harmonious relationship between God the Creator, human beings, and nature is broken by the harmful effects of neo-extractivism; by the pressure being exerted by strong business interests that want to lay hands on its petroleum, gas, wood, and gold; by construction related to infrastructure projects (for example, hydroelectric megaprojects and road construction, such as thoroughfares between the oceans); and by forms of agro-industrial monocultivation (cf. Fr.PM).

The dominant culture of consumerism and waste turns the planet into one giant landfill.

The Pope denounces this model of development as faceless, suffocating, and motherless, and as obsessed only with material goods and the idols of money and power.

New ideological colonialisms hidden under the myth of progress are being imposed, thereby destroying specific cultural identities.

Pope Francis thus appeals for the defense of cultures and for the re-appropriation of a heritage permeated by ancestral wisdom.

Such a legacy advocates a harmonious relationship between nature and the Creator and articulates the belief that “defense of the earth has no other purpose than the defense of life” (Fr.PM).

It should be considered holy ground: “This is not an orphan land! It has a Mother!” (Fr.EP).”

Day 4

Broken Relationships, Healing Wounds

The Amazon Preparatory document clarifies our mission of hope. Solidarity with the Amazon includes accompanying and sharing the pain, solidarity in healing wounds and recognizing our intertwined relationships.



“Already in the biblical stories of creation it emerges that human existence is grounded in “three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself. [...] These three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin” (LS 66). Redemption in Christ, who has vanquished sin, offers the possibility of harmonizing these relationships. The “mission of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ”, therefore, promotes hope both in the purpose of history and in the course of human history itself, as well as in the valorization and reconstruction of all of life’s relationships cf. EG 181).

Day 5

New ministries

Will the Amazon discussion on pastoral care influence us in Australia and our own planning for the 2020 Plenary Council in Adelaide? How will we describe the “Australian face” of the church?



“This gives way to an urgent need to evaluate and rethink the ministries that today are required to respond to the objectives of “a Church with an Amazonian face and a Church with a native face” (Fr.PM).

One priority is to specify the contents, methods, and attitudes necessary for an inculturated pastoral ministry capable of responding to the territory’s vast challenges.

Another is to propose new ministries and services for the different pastoral agents, ones which correspond to activities and responsibilities within the community. Along these lines, it is necessary to identify the type of official ministry that can be conferred on women, taking into account the central role which women play today in the Amazonian Church.

It is also necessary to foster indigenous and local-born clergy, affirming their own cultural identity and values.

Finally, new ways should be considered for the People of God to have better and more frequent access to the Eucharist, the center of Christian life (cf. DAp 251).”



Images used are [Unsplash](#), public domain, creative commons ([Wikipedia](#)) or are official Church logos.